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ABSTRACT

The United Federation of Teachers in New York City prefers to define accountability in terms that are appropriate both educationally and politically. The concept of accountability envisioned by the late Henry Dyer and nurtured by Fred McDonald and Garli A. Forehand of the Education Testing Service, with its problem solving rather than punitive approach, holds the most promise for identifying and eventually removing the causes of educational deficiencies. Two measures must be taken into consideration when measuring accountability. Minimum standards must be established that apply to all schools in the city in the selected goal areas, as well as a student development index that measures the relative achievement of students against some starting point. This system of accountability assumes that educators are adaptable and trained and are able to deliver in their particular disciplines. Teachers are convinced that by participating in research-oriented, problem-solving study they can find out what factors make for effective learning and take corrective action, if necessary. Unless accountability is to remain merely a concept never to be successfully implemented, accountability systems must be designed. Teacher Organizations have to contribute to such designs. (Author)

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The Future of Accountability

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The first system of unilateral "accountability" I know about was one imposed on the royal physicians of ancient Egypt. When evil spirits entered the head of a Pharaoh the royal physician was charged with opening the Pharaoh's head to let the pressure out. If the Pharaoh died, which as you may predict was not infrequent, the operating physician was held accountable and entombed with him.

While anthropological evidence exists that some of these operations were successful, the conditions at the time were such that the life-span of the physicians tended to match those of their patients. I imagine that there was some reluctance on the part of practioners of the medical arts to accept royal commissions, as the job often proved fatal.

The notion that compensation should be based on student attainment dates back to the 15th century when students enacted statutes requiring professors to start their lectures at the beginning of the book, cover each section sequentially, and complete the book by the end of the term. If the professor did not accomplish this he had to forfeit part of a fund which he himself deposited at the beginning of the year.

Many textbooks on testing published in the 1920's, abound with references to standardized achievement tests as proper indicators of effectiveness of a school and even a teacher's effectiveness.

The users of the term accountability today tend to equate the educational accountability process with the type of engineering process that applies to industrial production.

While the comparison may be useful up to a point, it can be seriously misleading. Education has to do with raw materials, but unlike manufacturing, we seek to develop a product which is rich in its variety and performance. Thus, the way in which we define the end product can influence success or failure.

We in New York City, prefer to redefine accountability in terms we could live with both educationally and politically.

About 6 years ago, in 1969, an accountability p[redacted]t clause was agreed to by the Board of Education and the United Federation of Teachers. The agreement reads:

> The Board of Education and the Union recognize that the major problem of our school system is the failure to educate <u>all</u> of our students and the massive academic retardation which exists especially among minority group students. The Board and the Union therefore agree to join in an effort, in cooperation with universities, community school boards and parent organizations, to seek solutions to this major problem and to develop objective criteria of professional accountability.

Pursuant to the clause, the Board of Education and UFT established a NYC Committee on Accountability. Recognizing

that there is little chance for an accountability plan to become operable unless all the participants see something in it for themselves, membership on the committee was drawn from top-ranking officials from UFT, CSA, United Parents Association, Community School Boards and CUNY.

Several nationally known consultants were invited to submit proposals. The major plans submitted to us included modern input-output oriented management schemes, external evaluation schemes which could then be institutionalized, designs involving performance contracting with reward incentives from outside agencies, and the establishment of alternate educational systems either through vouchers or decentralized community control. Most of the models suggested were based on the assumption that what is really wrong with the schools is the ineffective teachers in them, and what is needed is a punitive system to change this condition. This system should rely on pupil measurement which would be linked to teacher performance. Subsequently, 5 plans were reviewed by a wide audience and after considerable deliberation a plan submitted by the Education Testing Service was accepted by the committee as the most viable proposal.

We felt that the concept of accountability envisioned by the late Henry Dyer and nurtured by Fred McDonald and Garli A. Forehand of ETS, with its problem solving rather than a punitive approach, held the most promise for identifying and eventually removing the causes for educational deficiencies.

The basic principle as stated in the plan is as follows:

> The public, through different institutions and systems, licenses educators to provide a service to the public's children. The educators assume the responsibility for providing this service and are accountable for delivering this service and for its quality. The quality of this service is measured by its consequences; when these consequences are undesirable the persons who are responsible for this system and its services are accountable for changing the system and its services so that the undesirable consequences are removed . . . . In essence, then, accountability means that individuals in the school system and the system as a whole must take effective action.

The design itself describes a set of procedures which will furnish data on students' achievement so that judgments about the adequacy of their performance can be made, provides a way of analyzing the causes of deficiencies in the student's performance, and finally, proposes recommendations for taking corrective action which will remove these deficiencies.

At a later point the consequences of the corrective action will be evaluated. Under the plan roles and responsibilities for implementation are clearly defined.

However, other measures come into play:

·Minimum standards

Under the plan it is the responsibility of the Chancellor of the city's schools to establish citywide minimum standards which apply to all students and all schools in the city in the selected goal areas. In determining these standards the Chancellor will consult with the Advisory Committee on Accountability, teachers and administrators, and the technical staff of the accountability program. (I should point out here that the accountability plan will initially focus on the area of reading.)

.The Student Development Index

This device will give us another measure of school effectiveness. It is designed to measure the relative achievement of students against some starting point. This means that instead of measuring students in absolute terms, as in minimum performance standards, the student's achievement is judged against the achievement level at which he began. The relative gain is referred to as the SDI. It is a longitudinal measure since it takes into account where a school's students began and how they developed over time. The measure of what is considered a desirable development level is determined by statistical analysis.

The "student development index" and the minimum standards level give us two measures of school achievement.

The first is a relative measure and the second is a more absolute measure. In order to be performing acceptably a school must provide both a minimum performance level and a positive, or at least neutral, student development index.

At this time it might be helpful to say a few words regarding our organization's ideas about the use of tests. We recognize that the value of our accountability plan will certainly be questioned because it makes use of these tests. We have questions too, but unlike the NEA, which looks askance at these measures, we realize the limited choices we have to make. We could say that all tests are bad and, therefore, any educational decisions made based on such measures are suspect at best. Of course, the public could then immediately accuse us of being frightened of any measurement, but go on using tests and making their decisions without us.

One high-level, state official said the hope is that the test results will force a school to do better because of pressure from the parents. Publication of district test results and parents' reactions appear to follow this logic. But we oppose this tactic. In the long run such assaults upon the teachers and schools are likely to force educators into a very defensive posture and cause them to concentrate on public relations rather than on developing educational programs based on information obtained by tests.

Instead, our organization has chosen to approve the

use of tests, participate in studies of tests and encourage the development of new and better ways of making educational assessments. Meantime, we intend to establish safeguards on how we are going to use tests. Naturally, we would oppose any efforts to measure teacher competence by pupil performance or accept performance of pupils on these tests as the only measure of achievement.

While the role of tests is subject to question, the determination of minimum performance standards, and the development of an SDI will certainly yield significant information. However, measures of inadequate or unacceptable performance do not remove their causes. That is why the third step--the enumeration of variables--becomes paramount for the collection of another kind of data. Educators are well aware that there are many identifiable factors which affect instruction and learning that are neither quantifiable nor indeed measurable. These process variables, as they are called in the plan, fall into five categories: characteristics of the school's staff, program and facilities, characteristics of the pupils and characteristics of the community. The accountability plan will attempt to analyze the relationships between these process variables and relate them to a positive or negative SDI. By looking at the data collection and separating out the different variables, we'll be able to find out why some schools are doing better than others though they may be operating under similar socio-economic conditions.

Finding correlations will admittedly be a monumental task. Because of the interdependence of these variables, some apparent relationships will prove to be invalid and some will be disregarded as having little to do with the components of learning. Indeed, much will be learned from a simple trial and error procedure. Of importance is the cyclical nature of the plan, that is, data are constantly being collected, process variables are continually being examined, and, based on the information, the third and important final step, corrective action is being designed.

The next and most important phase of the accountability plan, and where we believe our plan to be superior to those previously devised, is its corrective action component. Each school and district involved in the plan will set up a planning and operations committee which includes teacher representatives. This committee will, with the help of the technical staff operating at the Board of Education, develop a corrective action plan which clearly outlines goals, programs for action and responsibilities of the parties involved. The corrective action plans must address themselves to eliminating negative student development indices, bringing schools up to minimum standards, and they must consider the correlations of process variables with positive performances in both these areas.

A planning and operations committee will also exist at the district level and this group will review the plans developed by the school committees. The district committees will report in turn to the Chancellor and his advisory

committee. It is the role of the Advisory Committee on Accountability and the Chancellor to consider system-wide plans and priorities. All of the various corrective action plans at all levels will be made public.

All corrective action plans are to be presented in terms of two options: what will happen if additional funds are made available and what will take place if no additional monies are forthcoming. This means that the issue of dollars may become critical and cannot be ignored.

What happens if a corrective action results in a contract violation or is based on an assumption that teachers find objectionable? The union will certainly insist upon teachers' rights being protected. If changes are recommended which we believe have merit given our support of the plan, then appropriate compensations will have to be made or we may have to be negotiated with or just simply asked about any changes that affect our members.

Predictably, all of this accountability planning did not take place without a great many trials and tribulations. While the committee was calling in experts and meeting, a new, and unfortunately anti-teacher Chancellor was appointed to lead the New York City school system. Unilaterally, he added representation from a number of anti-teacher groups to the committee.

Since the development of the accountability plan was a contractual matter that required our involvement, and since we had not been consulted regarding the new additions, we

withdrew from participation in the work of the committee. It soon became evident that the committee could do nothing without us. We finally reached agreement with the Chancellor that additional groups could be added to the committee to balance out both the nature of the representation and points of view involved. Since we had the most professional expertise of any of the groups on the committee, we were able to maintain a very strong voice in the decisions. It was our view of a research emphasis over a performance measurement emphasis that prevailed.

To summarize thus far, since education is the responsibility of the school system, the entire organization must be looked at. The accountability system must have a problem-solving rather than a punitive approach with corrective action strategies being included. This system of accountability assumes that educators are adaptable and trainable and are able to deliver on those areas of education which are their responsibility.

Perhaps you are wondering about our organization's reasons for agreeing to participate in such a study in the first place. I would like to explain. As you well know, for several years now education has been under serious attack both from the left and from the right. Public officials and the taxpayer have seized upon the findings in the Coleman report and Jenck's recent book, Inequality, as proof that school makes little difference. The argument goes something like this: since socio-economic conditions of the family

seem to play the largest role in the development of the child and since schools don't seem to count for any significant change, let's stop throwing away our money. In this time of taxpayer revolt, public officials have seized upon this dialectic and have used it to abrogate their responsibility by sharply cutting educational appropriations. And education, never a high priority in the best of times, has been denegrated to an even lower position in the funding hierarchy.

As the most visible recipient of public monies teachers are in an extremely dangerous position. Since salaries make up the largest portion of the school budget and schools don't cure all social ills, let's get rid of the teachers. And that is exactly what is happening around the country today.

What can we as teachers do? We recognize that some of what our critics say is probably true--that the influence of the family is the greater determiner of a child's intellectual development. However, nobody has really ever measured the full influence of an effective school.

Sure we know what makes schools better--smaller classes, adequate support services, paraprofessionals, adequate resources. The list is endless. The critics who control the pursestrings tell us, "that's your opinion, and it's within your own self-interest to hold that opinion." We, as an organization felt that even though we think we know what makes for effective

education, our opinion would not convince public officials who want to find cheap ways to provide services to kids who don't vote anyway. We were convinced that by participating in a research-oriented, problem-solving study, we could find out what in-school factors make for effective learning.

We understand the risk-taking in such an enterprise, but with various education schools, bureaucrats and businessmen coming up with a myriad of simplistic schemes to look at education, like performance contracting vouchers and competency-based teacher education, we must be in a strong enough position to prove what makes learning happen.

Unless accountability is to remain merely a concept never to be successfully implemented, accountability systems must be designed. Yet, designs cannot be made in a vacuum. The one group which has the most to contribute to such designs, if only for the necessary enrichment of conceptual models, is that of teacher organizations.

But many, small, local teacher organizations have neither the clout nor the sole responsibility for designing accountability systems. So, there appear to be two choices:

- Systems will be designed by those who have the responsibility without the contributions of teacher organizations, in which case the concept will fail from a) a lack of reality and relevance and, b) the resistance of practicing educators.
- The inputs of teacher organizations will be solicited and incorporated into the design of accountability

systems, in which case realistic and workable concepts will evolve, thus attracting the support of practitioners and others.

It is our fervent hope that the latter course of action is adopted by all school systems entertaining accountability systems.

Meanwhile, what is the state of the scene? Teachers, of course, are very cynical now. We question whether we can be expected to accept accountability schemes while there is a larger issue here. Public education is rotting in its most basic foundation for lack of proper funding. We are faced with a severely diminished level of financial support during a period of serious economic inflation. Schools and colleges are being overcome by the limitations imposed on them by a climate of financial paucity, which keeps class size impossibly high, eliminates periods from the teaching day, reduces support programs, reduces counseling to an absurdity, creates shortages of supplies, textbooks, library materials, allows criminal deterioration in school plants and, in general, thwarts the most conscientious efforts to make improvements. Who, indeed, is accountable for all that? Under plague conditions doctors are considered saints if they manage to save some lives. Teachers, on the other hand, are obliged to assume a responsibility that truly rests in other hands.

We see the joint and immediate tasks of the Accountability Committee as: 1) to pressure the Board to

continue funding of the plan and, 2) to provide information on the plan to teachers, parents, administrators and school board members--so that there is a complete understanding of the program and our commitment to work together.

The plan had already begun with the collection of data in each of 2 schools in New York City's 32 districts when disaster struck in the form of the financial crunch which hit our city and has crippled our schools. The accountability plan has undergone severe restrictions of funding which make it virtually impossible to collect data for the establishment of performance standards by observable means. Interviews, case studies and other on-site data collection techniques are expensive and time consuming. Therefore, we will probably have to opt for some, easily obtainable, quantitative measures, probably in the form of some already existing test results and accumulated data.

Then too, budget cuts have resulted in the loss of thousands of teachers, and other educational personnel and have had the effect of severely constricting programs, pressuring the curriculum and limiting choices and opportunities. Classes and services and programs which have previously permitted some degree of effective education have disappeared--they no longer exist as a source which will produce meaningful process variables or from which meaningful corrective action plans can be drawn.

At the request of the Accountability Committee, the director, Charles Schoenhaut, has gone the RFP and foundation

route in order to obtain funding. Several foundations have been approached and there are encouraging signs.

It is interesting to note, however, a recent happening which demonstrates the Accountability Committee's commitment to the original research design. A well known foundation which we approached considered funding a portion of the plan under its terms. We would have to agree to modify the proposal and field test the entire process on a smaller scale--in two districts, for example. Although we recognized the value of the field testing, we turned down the offer for two reasons. First, it was felt that limiting the field test would not yield enough corrective action strategies which would have application in other districts. Second, how a district would be chosen--either by volunteering or by coercion--would significantly seem to have serious implications as to the outcome of the study. Since we had spent 7 years formulating a plan we could live with both educationally and politically, the committee decided unanimously to politely decline the offer of a watered-down version of the original design.

In summary, it is our belief that accountability can best be achieved by a system of collective bargaining which makes the entire system responsible for those things it can change, allows the profession a strong voice in decisions pertaining to the conditions under which the practioners function, and assigns responsibilities to the agents of the public who deal with the needs of the classroom where, after all, education has its focus.